

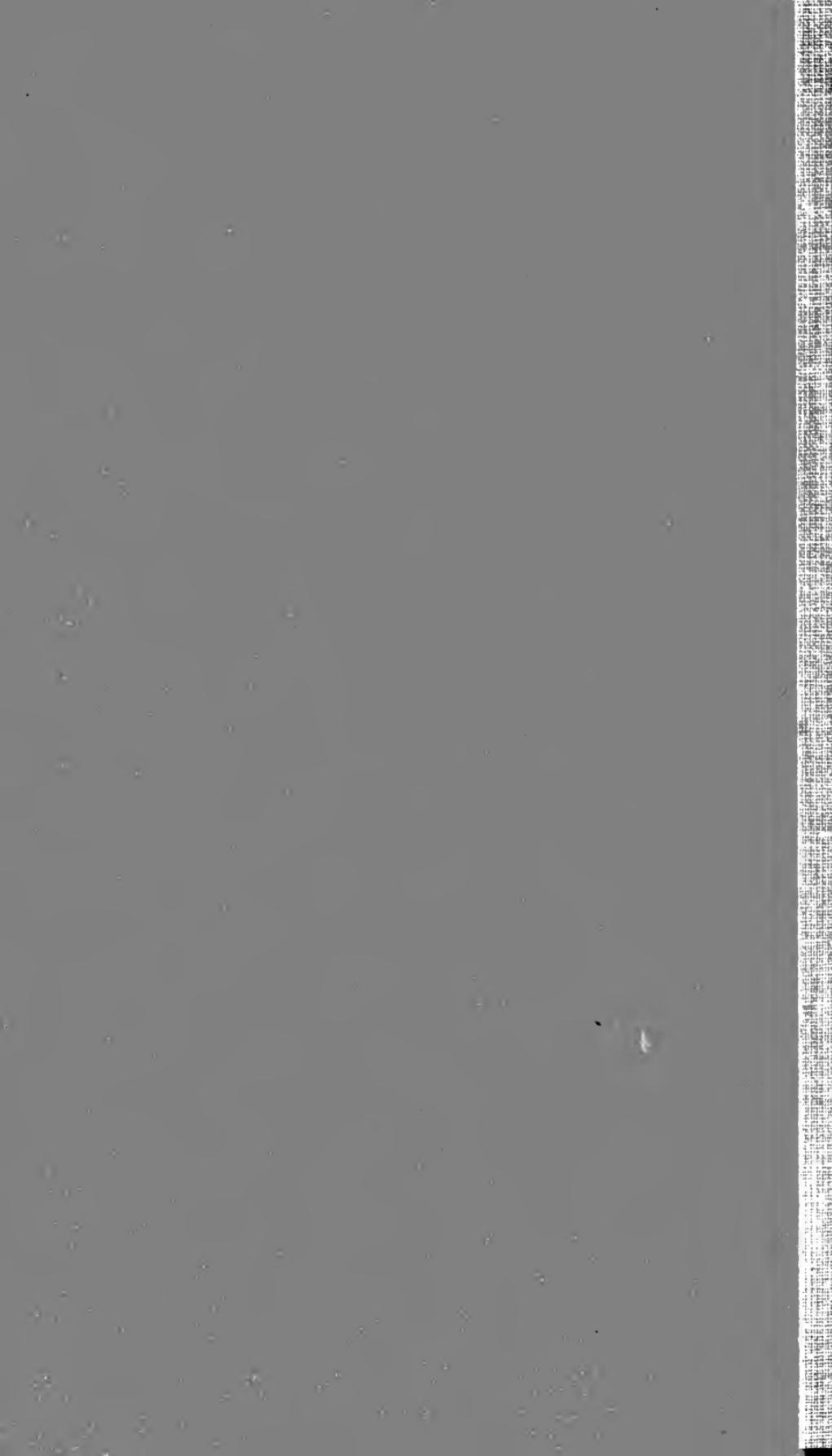
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THE JEWS

OF TURKEY.



LECTURE

BY

Mr. N. MAYER.

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THE JEWS OF TURKEY.

A LECTURE

DELIVERED BY

Mr. N. MAYER,

*Before the Jewish Literary Society, at the Beth Hamidrash, on Saturday, March 29th, 1913,
Dr. M. GASTER in the Chair.*

WHEN I promised to give a Paper on the Jews of Turkey, it was under the spell of the great changes which had just taken place and under my eyes. I had been an eye witness of the sudden transformation which had taken place in Turkey, when the reign of Abdul Hamid crumbled, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye, and a new order of things was established which no one had ever dreamt possible. A peaceful revolution had been carried out by a handful of men, the like of which has seldom, if ever, been found in history. A whole system of government had been overthrown without any perceptible loss of life or property. It was a sudden and absolute overthrow of a system carried out by the people for the people. An odious system of espionage, denunciation, persecution and exile had given way to a period of right, of safety, of self-respect and of justice. The various nationalities inhabiting European Turkey had suddenly sunk their differences and joined in the cry of liberation, which started in Salonika and spread like wildfire over the whole of the Turkish Empire. I was present on the occasion of this dramatic change, and I could see a transition from one stage to another being performed whilst I was standing by, amidst the joy and acclamation of the populace.

As I had the rare privilege of being an eye witness of the birth of the constitution and seeing it proclaimed for the first time, it might be of interest if I place it on record and give you here a faithful description of what I myself have seen and heard. Arriving at Salonika, I went to the Club; rumours were rife that something was coming, but no one had the slightest idea of what was in store. The next morning I left for Demirhissar, on my way to

Cavalla. Arrived at the station, Reshid Pasha, who was the Mote Sariff of Seres, entered the same train, and seeing me (I knew him from before) he entered the same carriage, and so we travelled together. He also, evidently, knew nothing of what was going to happen. An hour or so later we arrived at Seres. Here we were met by a band playing on the platform, and Husni Bey, an officer of the General Staff, with several other officers and a few soldiers, stepped up to the carriage, and, turning to Reshid Pasha, told him that the old *regime* had fallen, that a new Constitution had been declared, and asked Reshid Pasha there and then to accept the new *regime* and to take the oath of loyalty. Reshid Pasha at first demurred and then nodded assent. The people assembled on the platform broke out with shouts of liberty, equality and fraternity—"Long live the Constitution!" Husni Bey joined our train, and, arriving at Drama, stepped out of the train and addressed the soldiers and the people assembled, told them that the Sultan had been deposed, the Constitution had been declared, liberty and fraternity had been granted, and equality to all races and faiths, and a new era had begun for Turkey.

Husni Bey gave orders for the soldiers to load and follow him into the town to the Konak, and to shoot down anyone who would offer opposition to the Constitution. But this sudden change had spread like wildfire, and the soldiers were met with immense acclamation by the populace. Arriving at the Konak, the Hodjas and Beys were summoned to take the oath.

The manager of my factories at Cavalla, Vartan Bey, although living in the district, had not the slightest inkling of what was going on. He met me with the carriage, for there is no rail to Cavalla, and we had to drive in the carriage. With me was also a very old and esteemed friend, Mr. Richard Lockyer, of London. Seeing the hub-hub and tumult at the station Mr. Vartan got frightened, and urged us to mount the carriage and fly for our lives. But being well known and very anxious to be an eye witness of such an historic and dramatic scene, I refused to listen and followed the soldiers into the town and entered the Konak. There all the notables had been assembled meanwhile, and took the oath of fidelity to the Constitution. The one who demurred for a while was the Chief Hodja, but two men were standing by him with loaded revolvers, and one of the notables pointed out to the Hodja that his refusal meant instant death, whereupon he felt himself persuaded to take the oath of fidelity to the

Constitution. The Mutessaref was not in the Konak, so a deputation was sent to him, consisting of ten soldiers led by an officer. They knocked at the door of his private house and asked for admittance. The Mutessaref, who evidently saw that something extraordinary had happened, asked the officer to come up.

The officer went up and told him that he had come to invite him to the Konak, for the Constitution had been declared and he was expected to swear allegiance to it. The Mutessaref at first refused, and the officer replied "I have not come to invite you, but to order you and the soldiers are here to carry out the order." Whereupon the Mutes-saref followed him to the Konak. Finding that resistance was impossible he accepted the inevitable and took the oath of allegiance. Then he was asked to proclaim from the window of the Konak to the multitude assembled outside, the new principles of liberty and equality and fraternity and allegiance to the Constitution.

From every side then, broke out acclamations of joy, and the Greek Musical Band, which hitherto the Mustes-saref had prevented from playing in Drama came and played in front of his house, and all the houses were illuminated, and a new joy seemed to have seized hold of the populace. The same scenes were repeated everywhere throughout the Turkish Empire, especially when the wire came at 2 o'clock at night that the Sultan had accepted the Constitution. Such were the scenes witnessed by me at the proclamation of the Constitution.

But evidently this period of freedom, this promise of internal development, this new order of things was not to last. I do not wish to discuss politics, but it is impossible to touch upon the events in the near East without giving expression to some of the views so strongly held by everyone who has taken a sympathetic interest. For, was not Turkey the only European Empire in which the Jews enjoyed absolute freedom and in which no religious persecution against any other race or faith had been perpetrated? But political ambitions did not always square with internal freedom and economic development, and the whole policy of the Christian Powers of Europe for the last two centuries at least had one steady aim,—to crush Turkey, to drive the Turks out, to despoil them of their European possessions, and to make it impossible for Turkey to regenerate or to become internally strong and withstand the intrigues and attacks from whichever quarter they may come. Those who remember the promulgation of a

constitution under Midhad Pasha immediately after the Russo-Turkish war in 1878 will remember also the machinations and intrigues set on foot to destroy the constitution, to deprive Turkey of the strong men who had come to the fore and to favour absolutism, tyranny and re-action. If Turkey was to be financially exploited it had to be kept politically weak, and those European Powers were practically responsible for the events which finally led to the overthrow of Abdul Hamid. But those who had been working for years to establish the Hamidian *regime* were the same forces and the same Powers who speculated on the downfall of Turkey and on its slow disintegration, so as to become an easy prey to its enemies. The new *regime*, however, was not to be allowed to work out the salvation of the people, and to bring in a new era of internal consolidation and proper development. The young Turks were undermined, their work thwarted, the European press—especially the English press—vying with one another in vilification and in making out of every small blunder a tremendous crime, of every molehill a huge mountain. It was to be foreseen that no peace, no rest would be given to them, and thus we have seen the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Italian attack on Tripoli and the latest war of the allied little Balkan States against Turkey. What the future may have in store it is difficult to say, but to us Jews, the affairs which have changed again so dramatically within a few years are pregnant with grave dangers for our own people, now divided up among the various little Powers of the Balkans and forced to change their political allegiance in the twinkling of an eye. Now, who are the Jews who are living in Turkey, whence do they come? what is their number? where are they settled? what is their history? and what is their outlook? It is to these questions I shall endeavour to give a simple and succinct answer limiting myself to the narrow space allowed me for a lecture of this kind and taking only those general points which are of more general interest. It is not easy to estimate the number of Jews who live in Turkey. For the purpose of my paper I will with your permission obliterate the modern sub-division of the Balkan Peninsula, and I will speak of Turkey as I knew it in my young days, stretching from the Aegean Sea in the South, to the Danube in the North, and from the Adriatic in the West, to the Black Sea and Marmora in the East. Up to 1877 such were the boundaries of Turkey. Servia stood under the Sovereignty of Turkey whilst Bulgaria was simply a vilayet.

I well remember the Turkish flag floating over Widdin and Rustchuk. Varna was a Turkish port and the Balkans

only divided one province from another. The number of Jews living in that greater Turkey may be estimated at 250,000 to 300,000 if not more.

The first question is—how long since the Jews have settled in what is now called the Balkan Peninsular? The history of the spread of the Jews is one of those difficult problems which have hitherto not yet been satisfactorily settled. Ever since the dispersion of the Jews and the exile of the Ten Tribes, no doubt some of them must have found their way, not only into the interior of Asia, but also to the Western countries. I need not remind an English audience of the belief that the English people are considered to be, at any rate by one section, descendants of the Ten Tribes. The Irish Legends tell us of the journeying of the descendants of the House of David to the Green Island where hitherto even the ancient Jewish treasures have been thought to have been buried in the famous Tara Hill. It might interest the audience if I tell them that the late Queen Victoria was still a believer in the Jewish origin of the Royal House and a believer in the Anglo-Israelite theory. But leaving legends aside, and Spain can tell one, of the migration of the Jews to Spain long before the destruction of the Temple, there can be no doubt that, in fact, long before the destruction of the Second Temple, large colonies of Jews must have been living in what is now called the Balkan Peninsula. The spread of Christianity can only be explained by the existence of such large Jewish settlements in these parts of the world, and the oldest record of the journeys of the Apostles may be considered more or less as a kind of geographical sketch of the places where Jewish colonies flourished and Jewish synagogues existed. Salonika, which is older than Constantinople by many hundreds of years, for Constantinople was built by Constantine in the 4th Century, was one of the places visited by Paul and he gives a graphic description of his meeting there with the Jews and his going into the synagogue to preach, and in the same description of his journeys we find a large number of places mentioned and everyone with Jewish communities.

Unfortunately, we have no ancient description by a Jewish traveller older than Benjamin of Tudela, but it is sufficiently old enough for our purpose, because he visits the Balkan Peninsula in the year 1160. His narrative contains a graphic description of Jewish communities scattered all over the Balkan Peninsula. Although it is very brief, still, it allows us a glimpse into the inner life of the people at those remote times. We find, curiously enough, almost the

first ghetto mentioned in Constantinople where the Jews were not allowed to live in the town itself, but they occupied that quarter of the town which was already then called Pera, that is the other side, and it is now the most important quarter of Constantinople. It is curious that we find a large number of Jews in Thebes.

Probably the second in order, as far as the number and activity of the Jews is concerned, is the community of Salonika. Jews everywhere seem to have taken up manual labour, mostly silk weaving, cloth dyeing, and tanning. There are also artificers in gold and silver. In one or two places we find them tilling the ground and getting crops of their fields. But most notable of all is the fact that they had Rabbis at the head of their communities, learned men, scholars versed in the Law, and therefore, they must have had schools and charitable institutions, as well as trades by which to earn sufficient income to keep up these institutions.

In Constantinople itself, the Jews were badly treated by the Greeks. It is not at all impossible that the Jews in Central Europe had to suffer, later, exactly the same kind of persecution probably because of the intimate contact brought about by the Crusades between the West and the East, and nothing is so easily learned as a bad example in the treatment of the weak and meek. Jews were not allowed to ride on horseback in the town or to live in the town of Constantinople, but we do not find R. Benjamin referring to any bad treatment by Greeks in any other part of the Greek Empire; so they must have lived there tolerated and satisfied with their humble lot. The number of Jews must have increased after the great persecution under the crusaders when vast numbers of Jews migrated from Germany to the East of Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries, and probably a good number of them sought refuge also in the Greek Empire. But the decisive turn arrived with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain at the end of the 15th century. From that moment, practically, the Jews came into close contact with the Turkish Empire. I have already remarked at the beginning, that the Turks never persecuted any other race, and showed the broadest example of religious tolerance just at the time when the Catholic Church had established the Inquisition, and when Spain and Portugal invented the most cruel persecution of the Jewish inhabitants who had lived in the Iberian Peninsula for close upon 1,000 years, and had proved their attachment and their services to that country in innumerable ways.

When the Turks occupied Adrianople, and then afterwards broke down the Greek Empire and occupied Constantinople, the first act almost was to do away with that ancient Ghetto, and we are told that a large number of Jews were brought from the interior and asked to settle in the new Capital of the Turkish Empire. Honours were shown to them and every possible protection was granted to them and to this practice they have remained faithful to this very day. I may mention here, that among the Jews, there must have been scholars and physicians. The Jewish physician is a well recognised figure in mediæval times, and even in those countries and with those Kings and Popes who have been the bitterest enemies of the Jews, we not seldom find the Jewish doctor attending to their physical well being and health. The Christian Princes and Kings when the matter went near their skin showed most extraordinary tolerance, and when it affected their own personality they were broad-minded enough to seek the best advice. They would place more confidence in the Jewish physician than in the Christian quacks around them. Rabbi Benjamin tells us also that King Emanuel Comnenos, the Greek Emperor in Constantinople, had also a Jewish physician to attend to him and through his influence the Jews had some protection against the brutal attacks of the mob to which they were daily exposed. The Turkish Sultans had also Jewish doctors who attended to them, like Dr. Hamon etc., but the favour they showed to the Jews was not the result of any intervention on the part of the physician, but rested on that political perspicacity which the ancient rulers of Turkey had shown in the choice of men and in the broad tolerance which they showed to everyone whom they expected to be of benefit to the Empire. When then the Catholic Kings decreed the wholesale expulsion of the Jews and the people did not know where to go and they became scattered, some landing on the shores of Italy, some reaching Holland, and others creeping in here in disguise, everywhere merely tolerated, it is then that Bayazer, the great Turkish Sultan hearing of this act of cruelty gave orders everywhere that the gates of the Empire should be opened wide, for he said those famous words—"Spain's loss is our gain, Oh! the folly of the Nazarene." And then the board stream of immigrants flowed into the Turkish Empire. They settled in large numbers in Salonika. They overflowed into Constantinople and they went and settled throughout the entire Turkish Empire, as far north as Bukovina and Galicia, Hungary and Transilvania included, and as far as the Turkish Empire stretched. They reached as far east as Aleppo and Bagdad. They went down to Egypt in boats, and even into Asia as far

as Bokhara and numbers have probably reached the borders of Afghanistan.

It must be remembered that at that time Turkey was the dread power, which ruled all the lands between the Black Sea and Vienna. Everywhere Jews found shelter and protection where the banner of Turkey floated and the Pashas with the three horsetails held sway. Not from among the Jews were the Jannesaries recruited. They were allowed not only to worship their God in peace and freedom, they were allowed to settle under their own administration and they were given the same privileges as were granted to the representatives of the various Christian faiths, recognised and tolerated by Turkey, notably the Greeks.

In order to better understand what I mean, I may say that in the East, nationality and religion are considered as one, and on recognising the religion, the existence of the nationality which professed that religion was by itself included.

The religious representative became thus, the political representative of these nationalities. He had full power of administration, but he was also responsible for the well-being and the good behaviour, and the proper payment of the taxes which were imposed upon these nations. The Jewish Haham Bashi—*i.e.*, the Chief Haham or the Chief Rabbi—was therefore, and is, the political representative of the Jews, in the same manner and with the same powers as are granted, say to the Greek Patriarch, the representative of the Greeks. Whilst being the representative of the Jews on every question, he is the one who is responsible to the Government, as he is the protector of the Jews in every question that affects their political position. But besides this, the Turkish Government allowed these various nationalities complete internal freedom. They could order their communities as they chose. They could appoint their Rabbis as it pleased them. They could impose their taxes and could fight or compose their quarrels among themselves, and the Jewish Rabbis, or Jewish tribunal, had exactly the same power over the Jews' executive as well as administrative as the Turkish Court of Law. The Jews had to bring their cases before their one tribunal and be judged according to the Jewish code. At no time and under no consideration did the Turks interfere with the funds collected for the establishment of charitable or educational institutions, legacies left in former times were perfectly safe, they were treated like Etkaf—*i.e.*, Wakf—or religious endowments. Now, when the Jews came into Salonika, they found there a new Promised Land. They

could expand, they could do whatever they liked—no one there to hinder or to interfere. It was then at the end of the 15th Century that the first immigrants arrived *en masse* and settled both in Constantinople as well as in Salonika and Adrianople, not to speak of other towns like Janina, and Monastir up to Saravjevo, Belgrad, Bucharest and Jassy. Everywhere they established communities on the basis of the tradition they had brought with them from Spain, and everywhere they formed centres of industry and education. It would take me a long time to describe to you, the work that the Jewish scholars achieved at the beginning of the 16th century, immediately after their settlement in Turkey. But it might be of interest to you if I dwell on two or three points. The Shulhan Aruch is the work of a Rabbi of Adrianople, Rabbi Joseph Karo, and a Moldavian Prince, probably Aron was appointed to the throne through the influence which Donna Gracia Mendes held at the Court in Constantinople. It was through the influence of Don Joseph the Duke of Naxos—her nephew—that Venice had to give freedom to the Jews, and in fact all the well-known Powers that had Ambassadors in Constantinople were only too glad to enter into friendly relations with Don Joseph and with his successor the physician Solomon Asekenazi in order to obtain safety from the dreaded Turk, Don Joseph, it may be said in passing, was an ardent Zionist. He tried to establish a Jewish colony in Palestine and he obtained from the Sultan a stretch of land in Galilee which might be called the forerunner of the land to be granted by the Charter asked by the late Dr. Hertzl. In Salonika and in Turkey a large number of books were printed, among them then En Jacob and the Yalkut. The Bible translated into Arabic, Persian, Greek and Spanish, was printed in Hebrew letters.

Thus from every point of view the life of the Jews was an easy one and comparatively speaking a very successful one. They took to every possible branch of trade, commerce, industry, science, and they assimilated more or less with the Turks, being faithful and loyal subjects in every way and contributing to the remarkable commercial development of Turkey which took place in the 16th century. If not for the enormous activity which brought riches to the country, Turkey would not have been able to carry on the enormous wars which lasted close upon 300 years almost without interruption and without draining it to the very last drop of blood. I cannot discuss here at any length the remarkable Messianic movement which has shaken Judaism to its foundation in the middle of the 17th century. Known by the name of Sabbatai Sebi, although he originated in Smyrna

the later development took place in Constantinople and Salonika. When brought face to face with the Sultan, and being threatened with being put to the test of having three arrows shot at him so that if they did not pierce him, that would prove his Messiahship, he at once refused to submit to the test and turned Mohammedan. For all that, he had gathered round him a large number of followers, and Salonika which was more or less the birthplace of the new Turkish political movement and which for centuries had been the very centre of Jewish learning in the east became at the same time the very centre and birthplace of this new sect. No sooner had he turned, than some of his followers deluded into the vain belief that it was necessary to pass first through a kind of apostasy before they could reach the Messiah, followed his example and embraced Islam. To this very day the followers of the old Sebi known as Donmah live in Salonika and play an important part in the commercial life of the city, on the other hand they live amongst themselves, marry amongst themselves, keep to their own private customs, although publicly and openly they say they are Turks or Mohammedans. They are very rich and form amongst themselves a kind of Ghetto into which no outsider has yet been allowed to enter.

How this heresy has spread over the whole Turkish Empire, and how it has created a Frankish movement in Roumania and Galicia cannot be discussed here, and how it has had something to do with the origin of the Hassidim, is a matter of speculation upon which I cannot enter, but it suffices to show to what remarkable length the religious tolerance and liberty has gone. Though after his death, Sabbetai Sebi was more or less considered as a rebel, nothing happened to his followers whether they had become Mohammedan or whether they continued to live as Jews so long as they did not meddle with politics and did not interfere in the State. The Turks left the Jews to work out their salvation as they understood best. The majority of the Jews living in Turkey are the descendants of the Jewish immigrants from Spain. We Jews have shown everywhere the same tenacity, and just as the Jews driven from Germany to Poland and Russia in the 13th and 14th centuries have preserved the old German language to this very day, so have the Jews from Spain living in the East preserved the old Spanish language of the Castilian which they call Ladino. There is a rich literature which is very interesting indeed. But they went further with their tenacity, for when they came to Salonika, of course the original Jewish inhabitants being in a small minority soon

were merged with the first settlers and curiously enough when they built the Synagogue, a more capacious building to hold the new worshippers together with the old they called this Community and Synagogue the Kahal de Los Gregos, which means the Kahal of the Greeks. But they were no longer Greeks, they had been swallowed up in the Spanish Ocean.

When the Jews of other provinces and towns in Spain arrived they settled down, each one worshipping as a Kahal or Community by itself with its own independent Rabbi and with its own Minhag, and they called those various Communities and Synagogues by the name of their origin e.g. Kahal of Aragon, Kahal of Castilia, and at the beginning of the 18th century there were no less than 20 Kehilot in Salonika alone and a proportionately equal number at Constantinople. The latter place, being more cosmopolitan in a way did not allow, of such minute separation and the older Community was powerful and rich enough to withstand, for a time, the process of amalgamation. In time, however, they all became Spanish. Needless to add, where so many Communities existed side by side, each one with its own independent Rabbi and its own administration of funds, friction will ensue, and scholars, who are given to disagree whenever an opportunity presents itself, may sometimes seek an opportunity, and thus these various Communities were often torn by internal dissensions. In time however, the number of independent Kehilot dwindled and at the beginning of the 19th century there were practically only four Kehilot in Solonika, which were later on united practically under Haham Kowo the predecessor of the present Haham R. Jacob Meir.

I shall have to say something a little later on about this great man, so I must pass on to the administration of the revenues and the various institutions of Salonika. I have selected this town because it has played a much more important role and it has had a greater influence upon the history of the Jews in Turkey than in any other town. The administration is in the hands of a Kolel, a council elected by the various Synagogues recognised by the Government and till now practically responsible for the military taxes which the Jews had to pay like all other Rayas for being freed from military service. The income is forefold. A capitation on men, which is 8/- levied on people whose incomes are known to reach a certain amount, who are seatholders in the Synagogue: secondly the Gabella, a tax on meat: thirdly the Gabella on wine, cheese and matshot, and fourthly the revenue from legacies left in olden times. Out of these revenues the Rabbis, the Beth Din, officials

of the various Synagogues are paid, and the education and charitable institutions are kept up, like hospitals, schools for boys and girls, schools for manual training, homes for the aged and orphanages.

The general standard of Jewish life can best be gauged by a study of the Jews of Salonika. It is a problem which might be raised on a large scale. But here we have the definite answer. The Jews of Salonika form the vast majority of the inhabitants of the town which is practically a Jewish town; and yet the Jews are often charged that they cannot form an administration, that they can only follow certain trades, that they are too quarrelsome to work with one another and that a Jewish autonomous settlement is therefore an impossible Utopia. Moreover that the Jewish religious life is an impediment, or that the Jews left to themselves would not develop on lines of progress intellectual as well as industrial. In Salonika we find now the Jews living entirely to themselves. There are many nationalities in Salonika but each one in so small a number and with such distinctive trades allotted to them that there is no clashing of interest on any great scale.

The Turks are officials, big landowners, small shopkeepers, but not of any commercial importance. The Greeks are the public house-keepers, the grocers, shippers and merchants. The Bulgarians are gardeners, and those who deal with the produce of the land in Salonika. There are no less than 73,000 Jews out of a population of 120,000. Of these 4,000 are merchants who do a large export and import trade; and some are also the factory owners. There are about 5,000 to 6,000 tradesmen and artisans, shopkeepers, handicraftsmen and about 3,000 to 4,000 in the tobacco industry. The majority of lawyers, doctors, teachers and journalists are Jews. But the special feature of Salonika is the Jewish fishermen and the Jewish porter—energetic, robust, virile men, of whom the others stand in great awe. They load and unload the ships, and they are such faithful and excellent workmen that many of the big liners will take the Jewish porters or hamals from Salonika to Constantinople to unload the ship instead of using the lazy hamals of the latter town. There is no trade, high or low, mental or elegant, to which the Jews will not turn their hand and not do excellently. And the Jewish religion does not interfere with the carrying out of their work. Sabbath is the Sabbath not only for the Jews in Salonika, but for the Turks and Bulgars and Greeks alike. No business is done. The hamals have washed, the fishermen have drawn in their nets the day before, and they are dressed in their

ancient Spanish Sabbath clothes, silks, furs, or old brocades, and walk the streets of Salonika singing old Ladino songs or will loiter along the quays, a real holiday. No ship that enters Salonika can unload as is well-known, and on the great festivals the same spectacle repeats itself. Here we have then, an example, how the Jewish Community can work out its own administration and its own organisation, attend to its religious duties, its schools, the care of its cripples, or its orphans or its sick, the keeping up of the Synagogue, the appointment of Rabbis, the levying of their taxes, the worshipping of God, and do their duty to their families. It may be said that more or less the same thing that happens in Salonika, happens all over Turkey. And it has happened, so long as Jews have been under the sway of the Turk.

Now things have changed, and it is not pleasant to state that things have not changed for the better. Even if the Christian Powers would like to be tolerant in their own interests, the old animosities which have been kept under by the Turks would break out fiercely as soon as that Power has vanished which kept their passions in check, and the more these nations imbibe the so-called modern civilisation and assimilation, the more the feeling of jealousy against the Jews grows. First of all, these nationalities were living on a footing of absolute equality. Now, one wishes to lord over the other, and the Jew being the weakest, will become more and more oppressed and reduced to a secondary position. Anti-semitism creeps in everywhere. It spreads as poison and infection will spread. We have witnessed it in Roumania; signs of it are not wanting in the Balkan Peninsula, and the wires have told us of the outbreaks of Greek fanaticism in Salonika.

What the future of the Jews will be in these countries it is difficult to forecast. That the time of absolute tolerance has gone, there is no question, and whether constitutional guarantees will be more than mere paper guarantees, may be shown to us perhaps quicker than we anticipate. There can be no doubt, moreover, that the example set by Roumania and the teaching of the West will also create great havoc in the religious life and in the political situation of the Jews in these countries.

Still, the Jews will be able, probably, either to accommodate themselves to the changed circumstances or, who knows, whether another migration may not be impending, either further to the East or to Spain which is inviting the Jews to return. There is, however, one episode in the

occupation of Salonika which I feel, in duty bound, that I must relate, and as it has been told me by the Haham Bashi, Rabbi Meir of Salonika.

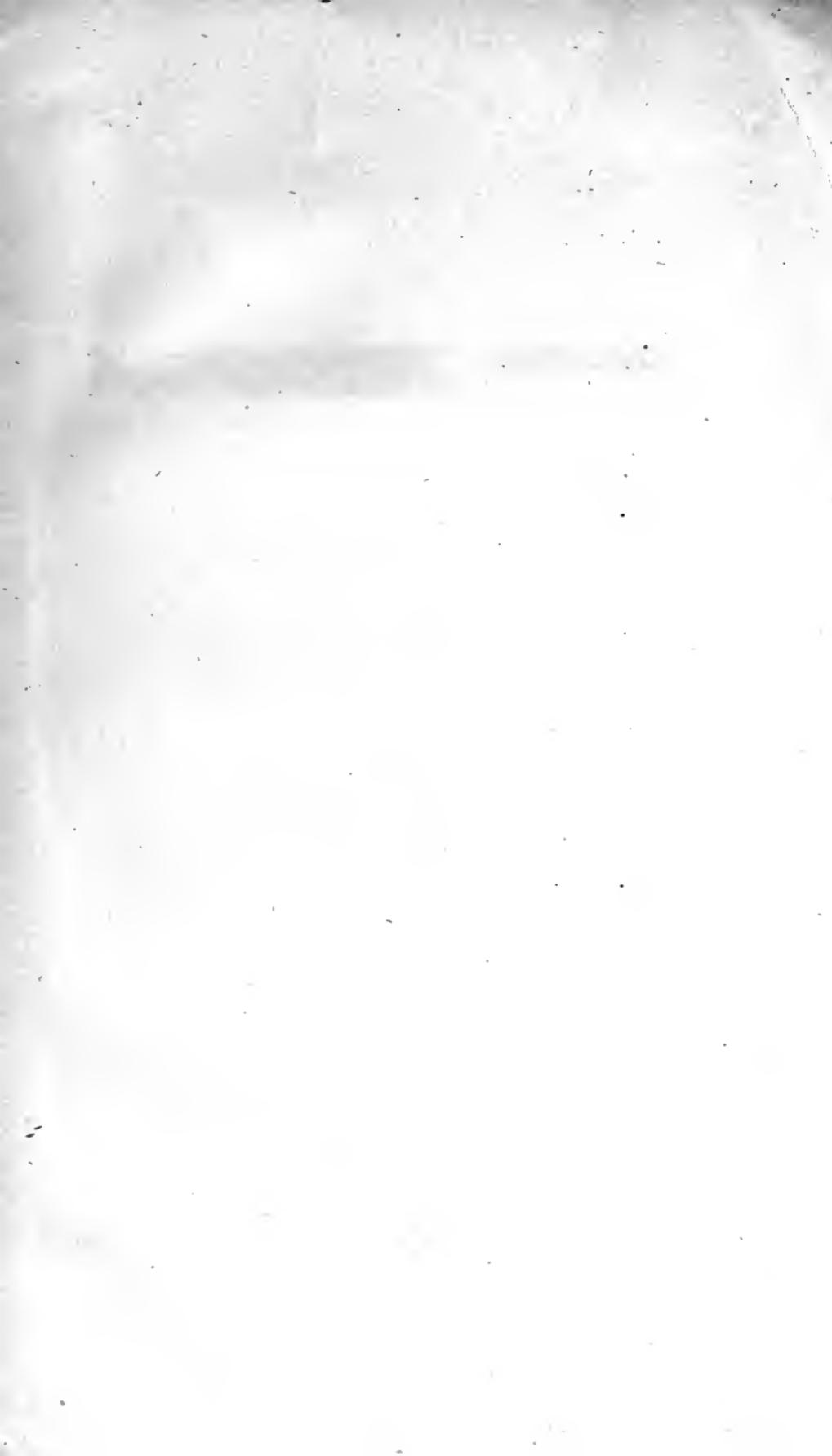
First and foremost in our mind was the situation which has arisen since the occupation of Salonika by the Greeks, and of course, the conversation turned on the famous letter written by R. Meir, on the persecution of the Jews at the hands of the Greeks at their entry, and the acts of savagery or brutality which had been spread throughout Europe and to which R. Meir had given a categorical dementi. I give you exactly his own words just as he told me what had happened. ‘A few days after the occupation of the town by the Greeks Prince Constantin (now King Constantin) came to pay me (R. Meir) a visit. After a few complimentary remarks the Prince asked me “Your Eminence (that is the official title) how many synagogues have been devastated?” to which I replied “As far as I know not one.” How many women have been molested?” and again I replied “As far as I know just a few were molested but, Thank God, they were able to resist and nothing happened.” “How many of your people have been robbed, and, how many houses have been pillaged?” I replied, “As far as I have been able to ascertain, the mob especially the lowest elements, taking advantage of the confusion, had tried to extort money from some of the poorer Jews, and I believe they have been robbed of about 200 or 300 lire, otherwise I am not aware of any other pillage.” “How many Jews have been killed?” “As far as I know not one single person has been killed.” “Well if that be so (said the Prince), what do you say to these wires which have been circulated throughout Europe? Are they true? If there is any truth in them please substantiate the facts? And if not will you state this, to which I unhesitatingly replied “I will state that they are not true,” for that was the fact, in that sense have I written.

“I may say that the Prince then told me that the Jews may rest assured of the vigilance of the Government and their protection and he begged me not to hesitate to bring any request that I had to make or any claim or protest under his notice, for every wrong would be redressed, and every protection would be given.” And Rabbi Meir added, “The Prince has kept his word” No sooner had I asked for anything affecting the Community, that it was readily granted. Now I have repeated here these words as told me in bare justice to a man who had a very difficult position

under the most trying circumstances, and from what I have been able to gather from my own personal observation, his statements were fully justified by facts.

I have nothing more to add but to thank you for the patience with which you have listened to this sketch of the history of the Jews in Turkey, especially Salonika, and I will now endeavour to show you some slides illustrating the observations which I have had the honour to make.





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